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ABSTRACT

Guidelines are presented that were produced as a result of discussions at a gathering of international scholars and practitioners at an international seminar on "Sustaining Local Literacies: People, Language, and Power," organized by Education for Development and held at the University of Reading (United Kingdom) on March 19-20, 1993. During the seminar, it was felt that there is a need to redress the misleading images and representations of literacy and language work that dominate much reporting of literacy activities in Third World contexts. These Guidelines are offered as a means of drawing attention to the importance of language issues in literacy work and as a help to those working in the area. They are not prescriptive or fixed and will be modified with experience according to the specific situations of different countries and regions. The Guidelines outline statements on principles of language and literacy respect and socio-cultural awareness; the need for a language and literacy policy in every country and what it should cover; resources for oral, written, and visual histories; and development policies for creoles, dialects, and standardized languages. (NAV)

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Education for Development

Some Guidelines for A Literacy and Language Policy

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Alan Rogers

EDUCATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

SOME GUIDELINES FOR A LITERACY AND LANGUAGE POLICY

Background

These Guidelines were produced as a result of discussions at a gathering of international scholars and practitioners at an international seminar 'Sustaining Local Literacies: People, Language and Power', organised by Education for Development and held at the University of Reading (UK) 19–20 March 1993. During this seminar, it was felt that there was a need to redress the misleading images and representations of literacy and language work that dominate much reporting of literacy activities in Third World contexts. These Guidelines are offered as a means of drawing attention to the importance of language issues in literacy work and as a help to those working in this area. They are not seen as prescriptive or fixed, and will of course be modified with experience according to the specific situations of different countries and regions of the world.

All of the contributors shared a commitment to the need for national and international support for sustaining local literacies and languages, not only in terms of rhetoric but also in the allocation of resources, including financial and political.

Principles

It is considered essential that policy makers and agencies take into account the specific contexts — cultural, social, political and historical — of literacy and language development.

Community literacies and languages consolidate the dignity and cultural consciousness of those communities potentially leading to empowerment. A basic premise of a Literacy Policy is respect for the languages and literacies of different cultural groups. This is a fundamental reason for the establishment of a literacy and language policy and for the proposition that *there should be a constitutional guarantee for the rights of all languages and literacies where they are valued by their communities.*

Language and Literacy Policy

There is a need for all countries to have a *policy on language* in relation to adult literacy which will include a *Literacy Policy*. An essential part of this will be an explicit specification of the languages and the writing systems in which literacy will be supported and the reasons for particular choices.

A Literacy Policy would include recognition of the danger of marginalisation of minority groups who do not speak major languages or use major writing systems.

The implications of each policy — language policy and literacy policy — for the other need to be made explicit and addressed.

Definitions of key concepts such as language, dialect, vernacular, indigenous, minority, literacy, functionality, etc. which are frequently controversial and ambiguous should be clearly outlined in the policy statement.

The implications of both policies for education (both formal and nonformal) need to be followed through. Language realities in each country need to be reflected in the educational processes and the stages through which learners pass.

Resources

All languages have the potential to be written down, and a literacy policy would entail providing resources for this process where it is desired and ensuring the availability of adequate materials. All language groups should have the possibility of support in initiating and participating in oral, written and visual productions.

A literacy policy needs to take into account a number of resource factors in the political and economic contexts:

- The ever-changing relationship between different languages and literacies, including their relative prestige and current resourcing.
- The balance between diversification and unification in the nation.
- The need to develop resources for education and training with respect to the role of different languages and literacies in national life.
- The requirement to guarantee the development of an adequate infrastructure (from constitutional to classroom levels) to ensure women's and men's full participation in local literacies.
- The provision of adequate materials in local languages and literacies and of the means for their production at local levels.

All agencies, private, public and voluntary, working in different sectors (health, agriculture, etc.) should be committed to sharing their information, experience and professional expertise to facilitate the promotion of local literacies.

Resources will also be necessary to make widely available to policy makers and educationalists in particular the findings of educational and scientific research on varieties of language and literacy.

Creoles, Dialects and Standardised Languages

Local literacies emerge not only in relation to established languages but also to new forms and varieties of language including creoles and dialects. A number of principles need to be addressed in these contexts:

- The identification of existing literacies in different creole and dialect contexts including what is being promoted by government and other bodies.

- The identification of languages-in-contact situations and of the relative power of, for instance, English-based, French-based and locally-based creoles.
- The need for collaboration between outside researchers and the speech community.
- The identification of the limitations which standardisation can impose and the implications of this for power and control.
- The availability of resources for both literacy and language, such as the availability of desktop publishing, for the production of low-cost local materials which can accommodate a wide range of variation in different languages and literacies.

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